United Nations A/HRC/28/NGO/97

General Assembly

Distr.: General
23 February 2015

English only

Human Rights Council
Twenty-eighth session
Agenda item 3
Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE.15-03368 (E)
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Rights of Minorities in annexed Crimea deteriorating

Nearly one year passed since the Russian Federation annexed Crimea. Since then the protection of the rights of the minorities there deteriorated. The authorities have particularly targeted Crimean Tatars, a Muslim ethnic minority in the Crimea peninsula who openly opposed the Russian annexation.

Crimean Tatars make up 15% of the population on the peninsula. The authorities have barred Mustafa Dzhemilev, long-time leader of the Crimean Tatars and Refat Chubarov, president of the self governing body Mejlis from entering their homeland. The authorities have also accused Mejlis of "extremism", harassed and persecuted its members and sealed its office in Simferopol.

On January 29th the Mejlis deputy head, Achtem Chyygoz, was detained on charges of 'organizing and taking part in mass disturbances'. Not only is there video footage demonstrating that Chyygoz tried to calm protesters, but the demonstration in question took place on Feb 26, 2014, the day before Russian soldiers seized control and weeks before Russia annexed the peninsula. Chyygoz is accused in connection with two persons dying during the protest. At the time one of the victims was reported to have died of a heart attack. Even if it were proven that both deaths were a direct result of the demonstration, the charges seem unrelated to the person arrested. Moreover the Russian criminal code was not in place at the time of the event, which is why, if there are any offences they should fall under Ukrainian prosecution.

Human Rights organizations and the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people have made clear that the arrest of Chyygoz is a further severe harassment of the minority. His house was searched on January 30th. On February 6th the Crimean Supreme Court upheld the detention of Chyygoz. After the court hearing his relatives for two days were not informed about his place of detention. Only on February 9th they were told that he is held in a single cell in the SIZO – investigation detention center. On February 7th, Eskender Kantemirov, another Crimean Tatar activist and participant of the protests on February 26th 2014, was arrested on the same charges.

Sinaver Kadyrov, a long time Crimean Tatar activist and founder of the "Committee for the Protection of Rights of Crimean Tatars" was deported from Crimea. On January 23rd he was on his way to Kherson, in southern Ukraine, in order to fly to Turkey for medical treatment. Kadyrov was accompanied by Eskender Bariev and Ambedijt Suleymanov, both prominent Crimean Tatar activists. They were stopped at the Armyansk check point. The guards took their passports and told them to wait. While Bariev and Suleymanov were allowed to wait in their car, Kadyrov was held in a little room and later told that he had violated Russian law. He was taken to Armyansk for a court hearing. The judge found that Kadyrov had overstayed Russia's 90-day limit for foreigners who are allowed to enter Russia under visa-free agreements and ordered him to be expelled from Crimea. The background of this court decision is the Russian policy of "passportization" granting Russian citizenship to Crimea residents. After April 18th 2014 all Ukrainian passport holders who resided in Crimea were deemed Russian citizens. Those who wanted to hold on to their Ukrainian passports were effectively made foreigners. Kadyrov had taken no action on his citizenship. But still he was treated as if a foreigner. In other cases, for instance that of prominent Ukrainian film maker, Oleh Sentsov, Russian authorities claimed that he was Russian, detained him in Crimea and sent him to a prison in Moscow. This shows that the law on citizenship is applied arbitrarily to suit the interests of the Russian authorities.

The editor of the Mejlis newspaper Avdet received "anti-extremism" warnings and the paper was threatened with closure. In the end of January 2015, armed "OMON" special forces raided the only Crimean Tatar TV channel ATR in Simferopol. The channel staff was detained and later released, equipment confiscated, the archive of the channel taken away. Crimean Tatars, who gathered in front of the building in support of ATR, were threatened with legal proceedings because their protest was not approved by the authorities. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the media slammed the incident as a "clear intrusion of media independence".

The Crimean Tatar minority has been targeted systematically. Crimean Tatar politicians and activists as well as religious dignitaries were especially in danger of being harassed: their homes were searched, mosques and Muslim schools raided, schools and libraries searched, people disappeared, others were arrested. Also persons opposing the annexation were discriminated against. The population feels isolated as there are no international organizations present on the peninsula. Also human rights organizations are only frequently on Crimea to monitor and document human rights violations.

That is why Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to call on:

The government of the Russian Federation to:

- Release Achtem Chyygoz
- Reestablish the right to enter Crimea for Mustafa Dzhemilew, Refat Chubarov and Sinaver Kadyrov
- Stop the discrimination of the indigenous Crimean Tatar population on the peninsula

UN bodies to:

- Establish international and independent human rights monitoring mechanisms on Crimea
- Monitor the trial of Achtem Chyygoz
- Activate UN Special Procedures, especially the UN Special rapporteur on indigenous issues as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to visit Crimea